

**[531]**

**For the 2nd time on the Marne**

on July 15, 1918

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After the Chemin des Dames offensive in 1918, which ended for the "Alexander" Regiment in front of the thick forest of Villers-Cotterets found, we were withdrawn to the Aisne for training, where we lay in the towns of Beaurieux and Glennes. Here we were prepared for the last great attack, taking into account the experiences we had gained. There were daily exercises and marksmanship, which took us to the battlefields of the May 1917 regiment. It was a strange feeling for us to be able to look at the remains of our old positions, Kaisertreu and Waldtunnel, and the graves of our fallen in peace.

On July 11 we received the order to march. In three nighttime marches we reached the woods east of Villers-Nagron. The Frenchman seemed to sense our intentions. His observation planes kept coming down and tried to illuminate our approach road with the help of long-burning flares. Often we had to halt our forward movement.

The stay in the woods was not exactly pleasant. Once it rained, then we also suffered from severe fire attacks. The 10th Company had a few wounded, the battalion staff lost two horses; the baggage commander Sergt, Mittelstadt had the other battalion horses, covered in time. A large ammunition dump on the outskirts of Villers was also hit and blew up with a crash. The day before the attack, July 14, there was still a lot to do. First, the attack stripes had to be accurately transferred to the maps. Then the squad leaders were instructed, as were the men. The scouts sent out came back and reported what they had seen.

The attack that awaited us was difficult. I saw that from the good maps and pictures from the plane. The Regt. "Alexander" was to work with the I. Batl. (right) and the Fus. Batl. (left) attacking due east, hard north of the Marne. The day's destination was close to Epernay. Right of the I. Batl. was the "Franz" Regiment, left of the Fus.-Batl. a Jäger battalion from the 105th Division deployed. In our attack strip there was a lot of forest and steep hills. When the battalion commander, Hauptmann v. d. Lanken, spoke to the officers and platoon leaders, I heard that everything depended on the attack, since the French were readying their reserves to attack at our rear in the woods of Villers-Cotterets. But we were all hopeful.

As dawn approached, everything came alive. Vehicles with ammunition rushed past, engineering detachments marched forward.

The heavy artillery positions in our vicinity created the necessary field of fire by cutting down trees.

At 10 a.m. the Fus.-Batl.

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<sup>1)</sup> Died on March 8, 1919 as a result of a serious wound received during street fighting in Berlin. **[532]**

done. In a row to one, it went on the three-beam way into the deployment. The ground was tough and sticky from the rain. Miraculously, the connection didn't break. We were in our seats just before 12:00 p.m. In the front line were 10th Company (right, leader Lt. R. Zimmermann), 12th Company (left, leader Lt. R. Lieffering). In second line 9th Company (Lt. R. Schuhmacher) and 11th Company (Lt. R. Hirte). There was, of course, no trench or continuous line. The 71st Regiment, which was further along this line, was also not allowed to prepare anything, otherwise the attentive Frenchmen would have recognized everything. At the stroke of 12:50 our artillery preparation fire began. During my long front time I had not experienced such an overwhelming spectacle. The shots from the firing batteries, which were closely packed behind us, looked as if the earth had cracked and fire was spurting out. The Frenchman fired hard again. It also hit our second-line companies. But now we didn't care much about it. Our own fire drowned out everything and occupied us completely. Some groups even started singing.

At 3:45 a.m. the artillery fire was to be brought forward and then until 11:00 a.m. jump in front of us like a roller of fire. At 3.35 the forward companies advanced even further towards the enemy position. At first nothing could be seen in the smoke. As we approached what had been the enemy's first line, a whole horde of unarmed French rushed toward us. They ran backwards shouting "La guerre finie". Apparently they were fed up. It then went into the Rarey Forest. Here it shot from all sides. You didn't know where it was coming from. That was very gross. A MG 08/15 from the 12th Company (I think it was Uffz. Albers) shot down a French MG from a tree. These guys fell from the tree like plums. With horns blowing, cheers and drums beating, we continued through the forest. This was very good. As a patrol from our left [annex battalion told us, the Frenchmen had been intimidated by our noise and had bolted. The drum merchant had scared up a procession of Frenchmen in the forest with his drum, who surrendered without resistance. A beautiful area opened up on the other side of the forest. Before us lay a wide valley with a stream in the middle; opposite a steep mountain (Hill 232) covered with pieces of forest, which in reality looked much more dangerous than on the aerial photograph. At

the foot of the mountain was the village of Montigny, next to it the Marne flowed like a silver lining. And the bright sun. But we didn't get to enjoy this unforgettable panorama. 15cm impacts drove us down the vineyard. The 10th Company had several casualties, including Lt. v. Boehn. Now we also received heavy machine-gun fire from Montigny and from Hill 232. Basically below we found some cover in a piece of woodland. In this forest we also had an unexpected surprise in the form of a French field kitchen with steaming coffee beans. The commander of the 3rd Machine Gun Company positioned his machine gun and fired on the enemy nests as far as they could be identified. Across the brook the companies stormed on towards the heights. They advanced a little further, but then suddenly lay dead under the fire crackling from all sides. The MG Comp. leader, Lt. Otto, was killed at the battalion headquarters. I was able to jump into the next hollow with the combat runners of the battalion staff. The 10th and 12th Companies were in front of a strong enemy position which we had not recognized. They couldn't go forward or back. With hand grenades they repeatedly tried to penetrate the trench in front of them in order to find cover in it. It didn't work. Through the [[glass I saw a French company, like a blue snake, coming from the right out of Montigny for a flanking attack. The officer aspirant, *Vfw.* Conrad, 10th Company, rushes towards it with a few men and inflicted casualties on it with a volley of hand grenades. He and his men were killed in the process. *Vzw.* Berlin, 3rd Machine Gun Comp. had brought his platoon into position and shot down the French company. Berlin himself is badly wounded. The companies of the second line could not move much either, since the French command the whole valley. Wherever he cannot reach, he shoots with rifle grenades, mortars and artillery. Our fire roller has long passed beyond the heights. French pursuit planes swooped down from above and shoot at us. Right behind **[533]** us bogged down in front of Montigny, the Franz Regiment fighting farther back for Chatillon; French columns can be seen marching on the left flank about 1.5 km away. Two captive balloons behind us, which could just be seen, were set on fire by a French fighter pilot.

The situation was desperate. Up front, none of our people were moving. The Batls. commander, Hptm. v. d. Lanken, had gone to the 12th Company and had still not returned. A depression made itself felt. Connection with the regiment could not be obtained by blinking, the Batls.-Adj., Lt. v. Kries, and I back through the valley, up the vineyard to the edge of the forest. The Regt. Staff had arrived here in the meantime. I showed the artillery spotter through the binoculars the recognized machine gun nests; Lt. v. Kries described the situation and received from Major v. Wedekind gave the further attack order. *Hptm.*

Lancelle from the 2nd Guards Field Art. Regt. had also come up with his three batteries. The three batteries went into position up here side by side. The ammunition they still lacked was carried by the companies of II. Batl. [[approach. The Frenchmen had recognized the movements up at the edge of the forest and fired in between them with heavy artillery. But that didn't bother anyone. Everything was geared towards the attack of the Fus.-Batl. to support as much as possible. At 11.30 a.m., after artillery preparation, the Fus.-Batl. started again. On the way forward we met Battalion doctor Dr. Kröner with the *San.-Vfw.* Lipp and the *Krankenträger-Utffz.* [[jacky When connecting the *Lt.* Güntzel asked me Dr. Kröner did one more thing, received a gunshot to the steel helmet and remained laying there. Suddenly he got up again and connected the officer.—Hptm. v. d. Lanken had returned in the meantime and was speaking to Lt. [[shepherd and [[shoemaker. When our artillery fire began, the 9th and 11th Companies came out of their cover and took up positions. 11th Company performed well, albeit with casualties. The 9th Company made a bad move at first, but then caught a loophole through which it advanced to the French position. We soon took the French trench. 11th Company rolled it towards Montigny. The rest of the battalion charged up the hill. The French fought back fiercely. I saw Lt. [[shepherd had surrounded a nest of resistance with his company. The enemy raised their hands and the 11th Company ran towards the nest. Then a French captain jumped to the machine gun again and fired. *Lt.* Hirte and *Gefr.* Sass were hit, probably also *Hptm.* v. d. Lanken had a bullet in the heart area and died soon afterwards. Our artillery now supported us perfectly. The machine gun nests she had spotted soon blew up. We pointed out others that the artillery could not see with white flares. The ascent was extremely difficult. The Frenchmen let himself be killed on the spot, he did not go away. Our attack was joined by the I. Batl. now also on Hill 232 dominated the entire Marne Valley, which is probably why the enemy gave way at Chatillon, otherwise they would not have been able to return. On the edge of the hill the French tried to [[sit down again. They repelled the platoons of the 9th Company (*Vfw.* Ratzow and Zinke) and advanced towards the Königswald. A French counterattack met us on the plateau. Platoon Schmidt, 3rd M.G. Comp., and Platoon [[Resistant, 12th Comp., [[shot down the counterattack from the side. At 3:00 p.m. we had the important high ground firmly in our hands.—*Hptm.* Bieneck followed with the companies of the I. Battalion and our section. Our machine gun platoons took up position on the mountain nose and fired into the French, who were running out of Chatillon and Montigny in dense groups. The Fus.-Batl. Augusta (*Hptm.* von Bernuth) followed and then took Port a Binson in one go.—*Gefr.* Tombrink found a few bottles of

sparkling wine in the cellar of a wine press house. We immediately drank them empty. But we also deserved it.—We couldn't reach Epernay today, but we could see the city's chimneys smoking from afar. —July 15 was the day for the Fus.-Batl. been very lossy. The companies were reduced to half, in some cases, a third of their combat strength. Except for *Hptm.* Lanken, *Lt.* Otto, *Lt.* Günzel and *Lt.* v. Boehn had battalion of wounded officers *Lt.* [[shepherd, according to v. Lettow-Vorbeck, *Lt.* Schliephacke, *Lt.* Komsthöft and in the afternoon *Lt.* v. [[cry lost. *Hptm.* Rönckendorff, who had reported back to the regiment from vacation, took over the command of the Fus.-Batl in the evening.

July 15, 1918 has become a day of honor for the Alexander Regiment. The French, fully prepared for our attack, had to commit three regiments against us. This smashed the Alexander Regiment. Almost 1000 prisoners were brought in by the Regiment.—For me and I think for most of my comrades too, July 15 is the last day of the Great War, which I was able to conclude with a feeling of victory and confidence in German strength/power/might.